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ABSTRACT

Requiring administrators to develop and implement a plan for attracting and employing high quality personnel is an important responsibility of the board of education. In the West Linn school district in Oregon, efforts are directed at recruiting beginning teachers and outstanding teachers presently employed in other districts. A representative visits schools of education to obtain the names of the best students. Outstanding educators in other districts are identified. All those identified are invited to visit the district for an interview. The interview primarily provides information on personality, philosophy, voice, and physical characteristics. The interview should not be a cross-examination; rather it provides a way for the district representative and the candidate to learn about each other. Because high-potential candidates want opportunities for extensive staff development program is important in attracting extensive staff development porgram is important in attracting good teachers. Unique components of the West Linn staff development program are a professional development fund of $125 per teacher for nontraditional learning experiences and a college credit course for new staff tied to the district curriculum and supervision program. The district plan to attract and hold good teachers must finally focus on the very critical decision of granting tenure routinely or only to those who are gifted. (Author/JM)

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D-65: THE BOARD'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR ATTRACTING AND LANDING THE BEST TEACHING STAFF

I am pleased to be here today. I'm enjoying the excellent Dallas weather--when you live in Oregon, during the spring any excuse to see the sun is welcome, even if you have to travel to Texas to do it.

I'm also pleased because of my assigned topic: "How to identify and land the best teaching staff." I've thought quite a lot about the problems of getting and keeping good staff, and I'm pleased to have the opportunity to share my thoughts.

In this, as in so many things I do, I'm never in doubt, though I'm often wrong. I have opinions on almost everything, and some of the most firmly held concern the importance of hiring the right people to work with our kids. This has always been an important concern, but it is more important now because your task, as school board members, of providing good schools for your communities is immensely more difficult just now than in previous times; difficult just now because of a change in our expectation for schools and an array of new problems to solve.

We hardly need to be reminded of the incredible changes of the past decade. The 1980s and '90s are becoming much different than anyone thought they would. Remember during the late '60s and '70s when most of our prophecies were about abundant leisure time, the probability of a 30-hour work week, and a surfeit of consumer goods and services? Instead, we find $1.50 gasoline, 60-degree thermostats, $700 gold, and austerity budgets at all levels of government. To quote Scott Thomson, "We are up against it more than anyone anticipated in the sixties." And our schools are perhaps more "up against it" than most.

Perhaps the most far-reaching change has been the evolution, during the last 25 years or so, of the concern for equality of opportunity to obtain schooling to a requirement that schools guarantee equality of the results of schooling. This new

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expectation has been played out in the arenas of school integration, requirements for handicapped child programs, and sex equality issues. In addition to these problems, schools are also wrestling with collective bargaining, declining student populations, broadened responsibilities in both child care and adult education, decaying physical plants, declining SAT scores, illiterate graduates, and a phenomenal increase in students with emotional problems. It's no wonder there is also an increase in emotional problems of board members. I trust that the recreational aspects of this conference will reduce, at least temporarily, some of yours.

To address these problems and carry on the school's central task of providing the skills and knowledge needed for adult participation in our society requires highly competent staff. Our concern for today is examining some approaches to increasing the effectiveness of your staff through improved hiring practices. Essentially, I'll be sharing the procedures that we use, not as a final word or how-to-do-it, but as an example of one way to approach the problem.

There is overwhelming support for the notion that staff quality is the key to school improvement efforts. Research on school effectiveness for the last 75 years indicates the key role that teachers play in providing effective schooling. The most recent affirmation is in the Phi Delta Kappa study of exceptional urban elementary schools. In the study they make a point that effective leadership is the key to school improvement, and that effective leaders make their impact by influencing the quality of teaching in the school or district. It's a truism that the quality of the teacher is the most important determinant of quality in the classroom, and the quality of the principal, the most important determinant of the quality of the school. It may even be that the quality of the superintendent, and the board, are the most important determinants of the quality of education in the district. This is not surprising or the least bit revolutionary--the research evidence just affirms our intuitive knowledge that good staff means good schools.

Every district wants highly competent teachers and administrators; the issue is, what action can school board members take to increase their chances of getting the best? To borrow a notion, and perhaps a phrase, from athletics, "How can your district get a contingent of super-stars?" Since the degree of staff excellence is a

major element in school quality, a local district school improvement strategy based upon attracting and retaining high quality teachers is probably the quickest and most effective way to improve your schools. This strategy has some obvious limitations, one being that since the strategy is based on getting the best of the available teachers to serve in our district it may result in massive local improvement and still not be very effective in improving education generally.

To apply a "people" strategy on a national level we need national social policy decisions designed to attract more high quality people into the profession. As you might guess, I have some opinions about how such a policy might work, but that's not our concern for today. The strategy that I will suggest to you may also be less effective in school districts with large staffs and little staff turnover. But I believe that medium and small school districts have no other method for school improvement that offers as much potential for rapid, cost-effective school improvement.

As board members you may have some difficulty in directly addressing the issue, because school boards in most districts do not interview and select staff below the superintendent level. You most often approve recommendations from principals or personnel officers. Therefore, the first step is to foster a need for improved strategies for staff selection to be implemented by your administrators. This can be accomplished by requiring your administrators to develop and implement a plan for identifying and hiring superior teachers.

In Oregon, we have a tenure law that grants a three-year probationary period before a staff member has permanent status. So the hiring decision is actually a three-year process that includes identification, recruitment, selection, special training, a three-year trial period, and finally a decision about permanent status. If your state has comparable laws, your plan for staff selection should address the total probationary period. The granting of tenure is an extremely critical matter--potentially a $750,000 financial decision for the organization, in addition to the instructional implications of making a long-term commitment to an individual teacher. The typical school district pattern is to screen out the obviously inadequate teachers and to grant tenure routinely to the other 90%. An alternative is

to screen IN only the top 5%, the gifted teachers who will continue to contribute significantly for years to come.

School districts are generally passive in staff selection. That is, they tend to advertise openings and then wait for applicants to appear. Little extra effort is made to substantially increase the quality of their applicants. We let the applicant pool generate itself, then we try to select the best of the pool. Although this strategy is time-honored and pervasive throughout the land, a passive approach to the generation of the applicant pool will not consistently provide sufficient talent to support a school improvement effort based on the employment of highly competent people throughout the district.

The answer is recruitment. Very few super-stars are walk-ons. They are recruited! The key to effective recruiting is identification of high quality potential staff members. There are some people who are gifted teachers; they are just born to teach. They have intuitive skills in mining educational experience out of the day-to-day routine of children. The gift is usually identified very early; often even at primary levels they are teaching other children; when they are in high school they are teaching Sunday School classes with 45 kids in them, or volunteering to work in your classroom. They are coaching kids in community athletic programs; they are working with community youth projects; every time you see them they are surrounded by children. In college, they literally burn up the track in student teaching and student management activities. Everyone knows they are going to be great teachers. If they are already teaching, they are the teachers who have 40 parents requesting them for their kids. They are seen volunteering for the curriculum work. Other teachers cluster around them for ideas and materials. They are child advocates. Their students seem to have fewer problems than other kids and they make more of an impact on student lives than other teachers do. These folks are the ones we want to recruit for our schools....But first, we must find them.

The task is twofold: we need to identify the gifted teachers and then recruit them to teach in our schools. There are four groups of prospective teachers that you should plan to reach in your district's gifted teacher identification/recruitment

program: beginners, fresh out of college; veteran teachers working in other districts; teachers who are returning to teaching; and teachers who simply apply without any previous contact from you--the "walk-ons" (this group has traditionally been a major source of candidates). The outstanding people in each of these groups should be identified to form a pool from which selections for specific jobs will be made.

We think about beginning teachers and teachers who are currently teaching as separate groups because we find that different identification and recruitment methods are needed for each. The third group, gifted teachers who have been temporarily out of the profession but are returning, are a potential gold mine of talent. Our school district does not have a systematized way of recruiting these folks, and neither does anyone else that I know about. They become a part of our "walk-on" pool. A school district might develop a program in which the recruitment and employment of gifted re-entry people was the foundation of their employment strategy. I suspect that there are relatively large numbers of teachers in this category and they would probably be appreciative of any district making efforts to ease their transition back into teaching. A major problem would be early identification. You could approach this problem through soliciting parents for names of teachers they know are returning, and by advertising your interest in returning teachers.

In West Linn, our efforts have been directed toward recruiting beginning teachers and teachers presently employed in other school districts and selecting the best of the "walk-ons." The first problem is to develop a hiring pool that contains a large number of high quality teachers. In January or February, we have one of our principals visit each teacher education institution in the state. On the visit, he talks to the supervisor of student teachers and asks for the names of the students who are going to become outstanding teachers. The names we get from these visitations, about 150 annually, form a large portion of our beginning teacher recruitment pool.

A second strategy we use may be similar to the practice of "head-hunting" in pri-

vate industry. We have enlisted our staff and parents in a program to identify educators not currently working in our district who have qualities that would be an asset to our schools. When we see or identify such people, their names are placed in an "outstanding educator" file to be contacted when we have openings in their area. This file is particularly useful in recruiting administrator applicants.

Our efforts to maximize the quality of the "walk-on" pool center around publicizing our openings to all teacher placement services in the Northwest and advertising our administrative vacancies nationally. We try to cultivate an image in the professional education community of West Linn being a good place to work. Excellent salary schedules, a reputation for high quality schools, and good publications all play a part in this. Since most of our replacement teachers are fresh out of college, we concentrate our recruitment effort on the pool of beginners that have been identified by the colleges as "going to be outstanding teachers." We begin the recruiting effort by sending each a letter welcoming them to the profession. We tell them a bit about our school district and invite them to visit the district. We inform them that we aren't sure of openings but want them to fill out an application and to come and see us. Many come to visit and have an informal screening interview. We treat them mighty nice because we want them to leave wanting to be a part of West Linn Schools. If we are still interested, they will be invited back for an interview and a visit to local school sites. At this point we often do not have a job to offer, even though the candidate is one we would like to add to our staff. We try to get a commitment from these people agreeing to contact us before accepting other positions. In effect, we try to negotiate a sort of first refusal agreement, and, of course, the next step is to offer a contract.

When we have an opening, we also consult our outstanding educator file for names of people who may be suited to the position. After a courtesy call to their supervisor, we invite each of these people over to talk about the opening and to visit our schools. Again, we roll out the red carpet and try to generate a feeling that

they want to come to West Linn. After the visit we invite an application, and, subsequently, if we are still interested, an interview. If we are going to offer a contract, we contact the present employer and notify them of our intentions. We are less successful in attracting high quality candidates from other districts than in attracting the best beginners, so we concentrate our major efforts in identifying, recruiting, and employing beginning teachers. We believe, without much evidence, that our recruitment efforts while the students are still in college will be a reservoir of good will that will aid recruitment in future years. We also think our "head-hunting" efforts will have the same effect. Somewhat surprisingly, we have had no permanent strain develop with other districts because of our head-hunting activities.

A major element in the teacher selection process is the interview. In fact, in 1962 a National Education Association study revealed that 99.9% of American schools were using the interview procedure for teacher selection. The study was repeated in 1970 with the same results. This is curious, since there is evidence that as it is used the interview is as likely to result in the selection of poor teachers as it is in the selection of good teachers. And yet, we all use it and, nationwide, consume hundreds of thousands of hours a year conducting interviews. On second thought, maybe that isn't so curious--in fact, pursuing unsuccessful practice may be normative human experience. I have spent most of my life trying to adjust my wife's priorities, with little results. Some wives, I understand, have had somewhat more success along these lines. In any event, there is so much common sense to the notion that visiting with prospective teachers will give some idea about their probable effectiveness in the classroom that we will surely continue to interview. Rather than seeking replacements for the interview, our efforts need to be directed toward improving its efficiency in selecting high quality staff. One of the problems is expecting the interview to provide too much information. The interview should be structured to get information about the candidate that is not readily available from other sources. There is some general agreement in the literature that the interview can provide useful information in six areas: personality, philo-

sophy, voice and physical characteristics, ambitions, educational experience, and knowledge of subject matter. We find it most useful in obtaining information on the first four items.

The interview should be structured to get information sufficient to make a judgment about probable success based on the comprehensiveness of the teacher's grasp of the basic elements of the process of instruction. An effective way to develop guidelines for making these judgments is to have some of your own teachers, of the kind you are seeking, respond to the interview questions--in effect, make a local district norm based on the answers of your most successful teachers.

Some elements that we believe to be important in interviewing are:

The training of all supervisors in interviewing theory and technique;

Planning the interview ahead of time;

Developing a structure for the interview for each position;

Ensuring that questions are job-related and open-ended;

Having one interviewer;

Recording the session and typing the interview;

In analyzing the results, weighing the interview in favor of your students, not the candidate;

And, after employment, checking your predictive skill with a validation check.

The interview serves not only as an important selection tool for the district, but also helps the candidate decide if he or she wants to join your staff. It provides a framework for presenting the district's personality, priorities and dreams. In this sense, it is a part of the recruitment effort. Your staff should avoid making the interview a cross-examination; it should more nearly resemble a courtship than an inquisition. The point is that in addition to getting information and displaying good manners, you should give some major attention during the interview to demonstrating or informing the applicant about the district's salient features.

One of the major elements in a decision by a high-potential candidate to join a school district is the potential for continued growth, so a part of a people-based school improvement strategy is an extensive staff development program. An

effective effort in staff development serves the dual purpose of attracting high quality staff and building strengths in present staff. In districts with minimal staff turnover, the only opportunity to have outstanding staff is to develop present staff. I believe that we have only begun to understand the great gains that are possible by providing systematically for continued growth of our teaching staff.

In our district, we have four components to our staff development program. We provide unlimited tuition reimbursement for planned programs for advanced education in the teacher's teaching area. A traditional instructional skill development program is provided at each school. This program is essentially planned and conducted by the local principal and staff. A somewhat unique program is a professional development fund that amounts to about $125 per teacher, administered by a joint districtwide committee of teachers and administrators. The purpose of the fund is to finance the special individual learning experience for staff that cannot be covered by tuition reimbursement or the traditional district inservice program. We enroll all new staff in a locally-designed three-hour college credit course that meets 10 times during the school year. Course content is tied to research on teacher effectiveness and the development of mastery learning correlated with our district curriculum and goals. Personal needs of individual staff members are identified, and strategies to meet those needs are developed. The first-year supervision program is closely tied to class work to enhance the translation of teaching effectiveness knowledge to classroom practice. We try to have everyone in the district exhibit an attitude that conveys to our new staff our expectations and faith that they will become master teachers.

I have touched briefly upon the notion that in school improvement it is as important to hold and improve good staff as to attract high quality new staff. It now seems clear that many of the items traditionally linked with job satisfaction--money, security, pleasant environment--are only significant as dissatisfiers if they are not present. Substantial efforts to improve these areas in a program to increase your holding power for outstanding staff will probably not be pro-

ductive. Providing challenging responsibility and the freedom to influence working conditions are the most effective ways to hold good staff. Some ways to increase responsibility include the formal process of department heads and committee appointments; some care must be taken here that this work is not viewed as extraneous or administrative. Many good teachers do not want to do administrative work or aspire to be administrators. There are also very effective informal arrangements that include ad hoc committees to help solve particular problems, and as special informal advisors to the superintendent or the principal. The point is that if you are going to keep superior staff they must have a part of the action.

One assumption implicit in "attracting good staff" is that openings are available. Many schools do not have openings; in fact, they have a surplus of teachers. An improvement strategy based upon people may not be as viable under those conditions, but I believe most districts can find some room for new staff by a creative use of early retirement, transfer, and tenure policies. An early retirement program merits consideration by all districts because it can meet some special staff needs, save the district money, and potentially increase instructional improvement by providing the opportunity to add new staff.

In summary, boards have no higher calling than the responsibility to hire highly competent staff. The best way for you to discharge this responsibility is to require your administrators to develop and implement a plan for attracting and employing high quality personnel. The plan should address recruiting broadly from: beginning teachers, veteran teachers, and returning teachers; and provide for a selection process based upon careful investigation of competence. The plan should also include a systematized program for installing new staff in the district and providing for their further growth and development, focusing on the very critical decision of granting permanent status.

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